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ABSTRACT

This study describes and assesses the basic problems of black males who enter educational administration as a career, showing the relationship between their cultural background and their aspirations in the field of administration of a large city school system. The role taken by the researcher is that of participant-observer. The collection of field data entailed the following: (1) a written survey (questionnaire); (2) interviews and tape recordings, if and where possible; (3) an inspection and/or review of the "Job Analysis Division" as a description of each administrative position and requirements for these positions; and, (4) a search of personnel records in order to show career achievement and professional growth patterns. The data source was the total population of Black Male School Administrators working in a large urban school system. All the black administrators were surveyed and interviewed. A search of personnel records was made to determine career achievement and professional growth patterns from educational beginning in the system to present. There were a total of 40 individuals in the study. Some of the problems uncovered by this study included that of identifying racial prejudice as opposed to normal job competition. Blacks compete among themselves for good jobs, as well as against whites, and whites, too, must compete against each other as well as blacks. (Author/JM)

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THE BLACK PLATEAU

by

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Purpose

This study is intended to survey the progress made by Blacks in the field of elementary and secondary school administration. The status of a larger gross salary represents natural appeals to those entering teaching who are upwardly mobile. On a teacher's salary scale primarily computed for many years in terms of what was sufficient for a single woman living away from home, men especially were prone to look to administration and the administrative appointments as a way of increasing income that permitted them to stay in the school system. Those considering administration as a career in education were largely self-nominated and asked for a tryout on initial administrative assignment.[1]

When differentiation in certification required for administration and certification required for teaching developed, it was in terms of being "eligible" for initial administrative appointment, rather than for being competently trained for a career in educational administration. Therefore, after going through the stages of educational growth and becoming completely prepared as a certified administrator, there is a belief that Black male school administrators normally do not think about or seem to seek many of more lucrative higher administrative positions found in the large complex of an urban school system.[2]

The Black male school administrator seems to be happiest, or perhaps most complacent, upon attaining the position of school principal.

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[1]Rouse, Donald E., "Career Aspirations of Black School Administrators in a Large Urban School System." An Unpublished Thesis in Educational Administration, Penn State University, 1973.

[2]Ibid.

This seems to have become the major goal of most Black males who become prepared and certified in the field of school administration. Thus, the principalship for Black males can be classified as a "Black plateau" in educational administration in large city school systems. It was also the objective of this research to find reasons for this phenomenon currently appearing in the urban school system, known as the Black Plateau.

The impact, particularly in the inner cities, made by greatly increased participation of Black students, and the need for more upper level Black male school administrators cannot, from a Black point of view, be over-stressed. This need is not a matter of attaining quotas, or of pacifying various civil rights groups. It is, in fact, a matter of economic "life and death" for Blacks in the United States.[3]

A simplified view of the American educational systems is one of a series of self-contained stages, with each stage a prerequisite for movement to the next. Moreover, the stages are interconnected to the extent that actions, decisions, and performance undertaken in one stage act as constraints upon actions in a subsequent stage. Thus, as one moves from completion of grade school through completion of a graduate degree, the probability of a high status occupation should be increased.

This study is designed to demonstrate the fact that the whole solution to Black equality may well depend solely on the matter of education, and the way it is administered.

A better education as a means of bettering Black income and making the more desirable positions of employment accessible, seems to be a sound

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[3]Eckstein, Otto, Education, Employment, and Negro Equality, Seminar on Manpower Policy and Program. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1968.

solution. However, getting a good education is largely dependent on one's existing income, and conversely getting a good income depends largely on one's educational status. The high cost of financing a good college education makes it difficult for lower economic groups to do so, and this is a problem that the inner city Black community must overcome.[4]

The specific area to be covered in this study was the attitudes and aspirations of Black male school administrators currently working or retired. The study demonstrates how the Black male school administrator views the school system, and his place in it. Also, in a less direct way, it indicates how he imagines his co-workers see him and what he feels are his major obstacles to further promotion up the administrative ladder. The outcome provides some indication of how to attract more qualified Blacks into the field of school administration.

Each year there are openings in higher administrative posts that are not filled by Black male school administrators because they are either unaware of them, or they feel they are not qualified or that they do not have a chance because they are Black, or for other reasons, simply do not strive to obtain them. Many of these are positions where policy can be developed. There are at least 50% of the Black administrators who fall into this category.

It is specifically to the problem of upper level promotions that this study is concerned. It has examined and attempted to evaluate the attitudes and concerns of Black male school administrators in the hope that by so airing beliefs and opinions that are usually kept confidential, it

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[4]Kiser, Clyde V., "Current Items - Indicators of Recent Demographic Change Among Blacks," Population Index, Vol. 37, No. 3.

will assist them in achieving a more objective point of view which, hopefully, will make it a little easier to advance, and thus reach their fullest potential.

Method

It is the purpose of this study to describe and assess the basic problems of Black males who enter educational administration as a career, showing the relationship between their cultural background and their aspirations in the field of administration of a large city school system. It is hoped that such data will help to lay the groundwork for the development of those programs needed to guide Black male school administrators into the policy making areas of education represented by higher positions in administration.

The method utilized to obtain data was the field method of research. Through this method descriptive data can best be collected and analyzed and involvement can be obtained. The researcher had an opportunity to work with and among his peers thus gaining insight into this problem.

Through informal interviews and careful field notes, true feelings as to the career development of the Black male school administrator as he exhibits them, were more likely to emerge. These descriptive data were used to develop a model which provides an opportunity for Black administrators to secure information so that the school system might establish programs to combat the organizational inadequacy that the Black administrative plateau presents.

Basic to the overall research project was the constant process of interaction between data collection and evaluation. Just as theory

development and analysis depend upon the data collected, so do the methods of data collection. The researcher, however, spent a major portion of the time in close contact with his peers, interacting with them in order to seek a clearer picture of their aspirations in educational administration.

The role of the researcher is that of participant-observer utilizing the field method data collection procedure as mentioned before. The collection of field data employed the following:

1. A written survey (questionnaire)
2. Interviews and tape recordings if and where possible
3. An inspection and/or review of the "Job Analysis Division" as a description of each administrative position and requirements for these positions
4. A search of personnel records in order to show career achievement and professional growth patterns.

Information needed to test the hypotheses or assumptions consisted of the responses to the questionnaires completed by those Black male school administrators that were contacted. The replies were then hand scored and evaluated.

Data Source

The data source was the total population of Black Male School Administrators working in a large urban school system. All the Black administrators were surveyed and interviewed. A search of personnel records was made to determine career achievement and professional growth patterns from educational beginning in the system to present.

There were a total of 40 individuals in the study, which composed the Black administrative population of this urban system at the plateau of principalship, and they were chosen because they were Black, male, school administrators in a large urban school system, and agreed to cooperate. Their names were obtained from a publication put out by the urban school system listing all administrative positions, the salary range each was paid, and who held each position. All were principals either working in position or retired from same.

A variety of data collection methods were used, including, for example, telephone interviews with some of the participants by this researcher, and by personal correspondence, in addition to some face to face meetings. Through these relatively informal contacts careful notes were made either during the interviews or immediately after, as dictated by the situation. True feelings as to the career development of the Black male school administrator, as he himself sees it, are more likely to emerge during such unstructured, informal interviewing.

The researcher was not included as a respondent to the written questionnaire, and maintained the posture of a more or less obscure correspondent except that it was made clear to the participants that the researcher-correspondent was also a Black, male, school administrator like themselves. It was not ascertained what effect, if any, these may have had on the responses.

Results and Conclusions

These data were used to develop a model which will give Black administrators an opportunity to secure information. Also, they provide a

guideline for a school system to follow in establishing programs aimed at combating the organizational inadequacies, real or imagined, that Black male administrators may encounter as they attempt to climb the organizational ladder.

There seem to be a wide disparity between the data from the written survey and the data from the field study. The written survey indicated that Black male administrators aspired to higher positions and that they had the qualifications needed to advance.

The field study data tended to support the findings regarding qualifications, but as to aspirations, the outlook was extremely pessimistic. All 40 participants seemed to desire promotions; however all but three seemed convinced that promotion for them was all but hopeless, due primarily, they believed, to their being Black. They seemed so firmly convinced of their inability to progress up the administrative ladder because of racial bias that their aspirations appeared to be purely academic.

An analysis of the data explains the existence of a "Black plateau" beyond which Blacks tend not to advance in any significant number. Statistics gathered in the urban school system during the summer of 1972 also support the existence of the "Black plateau." Out of 89 administrative positions higher than that of principal, 19 or 21.3 percent are held by Blacks, and these, 14 or 15.7 percent are held by Black males (the other five being Black females). The Black community, on the other hand, represents about 30 percent of the population of the city. If the 30 percent figure is used as a standard, it would mean the urban school system is

deviating from the community standard by almost 10 percent, or in numbers, approximately eight administrators short of full equality.

One possible explanation may be that there has not been enough time for Black administrators to develop and gravitate to the top administrative positions through normal channels. The civil rights movement is approximately 20 years old. Added to that the fact that in the beginning, very little progress was made. There seems a possibility that the apparent numerical existence of a Black plateau may or could be a transitional phenomenon. If so, future statistics will bear witness to the fact.

Although this study was restricted to Black male school administrators, the responses indicated that equality in the school administrative system may be different for Blacks than it is for whites. There seems no real standard.

As a result of this study, a model was developed providing an opportunity for Black administrators to secure information and help the urban school system combat organizational inadequacy resulting in the Black administrative plateau present.

The study spells out the glaring reasons why the "Black plateau" exists. The principalship should no longer be the "Black plateau" which stereotypes the ability of Black male school administrators who work in a predominately Black school system as far as pupil population is concerned. The idea that Black male school administrators are not adequately prepared for higher or even top level administrative positions is dispelled by this study.

Investigation into the cultural and social backgrounds of Black administrators produced evidence as to material and professional security

which has resulted in the "Black plateau." Regardless of the composition of many large urban school systems, there are no Black administrators in policy-making positions to be found in most school systems.

Some of the problems uncovered by this study included that of identifying racial prejudice as opposed to normal job competition. Blacks compete among themselves for good jobs, as well as against whites, and whites, too, must compete against each other as well as Blacks. Exactly what is the anatomy of racism? How can it be isolated from normal job competition where Blacks and whites are both involved? In fact, can it be isolated? Or is a certain amount of racism can, or should, be tolerated?

The answers to these questions pose a major problem for the aspiring Black male school administrator. This researcher feels very strongly that additional studies are needed to answer these questions.

Educational Importance

An entire new approach to educational administration as it deals with Blacks should be initiated in our institutions of higher learning. The institutions of higher learning should produce in number, prepared Blacks who can create a challenge for the top administrative positions in the complex urban systems.

Blacks in education should be made aware of the many areas of administration that carry the policy-making power and be guided so as to achieve in these areas. Institutions of higher learning need to review programs, and develop curriculums which break down old patterns under which Blacks have been educated, and create a new atmosphere that will no longer hinder the development or progress of Blacks in leadership roles.

From the model developed in this research should come a top level, policy-making program. This program should be geared to develop administrators through urban system sponsored training. This will not only open the avenues of creativity, but will give purpose and stability to the operation of the entire urban system.

It is felt that the "Schematic Model of Elements Needed to Overcome the Black Plateau," that follows, points out how the relationship between urban school systems and institutions of higher education can and must form a jointure in developing special programs for Black educators. From these special programs will come a "pool" of Black leadership talent. This talent can then be drawn upon to supply Blacks for top policy making positions.

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SCHEMATIC MODEL OF ELEMENTS NEEDED TO OVERCOME THE BLACK PLATEAU